

May 8, 2006

# Afghanistan **Freedom**

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan

Mountain villagers get  
healthy dose of humanitarian aid

Page 8



**Afghan President Hamid Karzai inspects the Afghan National Police April 28 during Asht-e-Sawr, a parade honoring the 14th anniversary of the Mujahideen rebels' victory over the country's former Soviet-backed government.**

Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Mason T. Lowery  
Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan

**Cover: A father explains his son's medical condition during a village outreach program in Khas Uruzgan on April 17.**

Photo by Army Sgt. Cain S. Claxton

## Contents

**Page 3: ANA communications reach milestone**

**Page 4: Afghan, Coalition doctors provide care for Kunar residents**

**Page 5: Afghan journalists graduate media basic training**

**Page 6: Lashkar Gah gets new conference hall**

**Page 8: Mountain villagers get healthy dose of humanitarian aid** ►

**Page 10: Muslim Marines defend freedom, Islam**

**Page 12: Route-clearing Soldiers stalk munitions**



**Page 14: Around the Services**

**Page 15: Afghans celebrate freedom** ►



## *Afghanistan* **Freedom** Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan **Watch**

*Freedom Watch* is a weekly publication of  
Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan.

CFC-A Commander Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry  
Public Affairs Officer Col. Tom Collins

*Freedom Watch*, an Army publication, is published each Monday by the 19th Public Affairs Detachment at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Printed circulation is 5,000 copies per week.

In accordance with AR-360-1, this Army newspaper is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. military overseas.

Contents of the *Freedom Watch* are not necessarily the official view of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Army.

Deadline for submissions is 0730 Zulu each Friday. All submissions are subject to editing by the 19th Public Affairs Detachment, located in Bldg. 415, Room 205, Bagram Airfield. We can be reached at DSN 318-231-3338.

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# ANA communications reach milestone



Courtesy photo

Afghan National Army Maj. Abdul Anan, left, and Capt. Gul Mohammed, officers with the ANA's Communications Support Element, perform radio checks during the unit's first deployment.

## Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan Public Affairs

**KABUL, Afghanistan** -- A unique Afghan National Army communications unit reached a milestone recently by demonstrating its capability to plan, deploy and establish a communications station.

The communication support element provides ANA leadership with the capability to extend command and control systems to a deployed operations center anywhere in Afghanistan.

The battalion-sized unit is being developed to support the needs of the National Military Command Center in the event of a failure at the primary facility.

The CSE is also tasked with restoring communications for up to two of the ANA Corps headquarters and providing critical communications during a natural disaster.

The CSE soldiers demonstrated their abilities when they deployed to the National Stadium in Kabul on March 20 to provide communications for the ANA's on-scene security element supporting the New Year's Day activities.

The CSE personnel employed base sta-

tion very high frequency radios as well as man-portable units for use throughout the site.

Additionally, they set up a high frequency radio station to provide long haul connectivity to the ANA Corps and the NMCC.

Within a few hours, the CSE's systems were ready to provide ANA leadership with the capabilities to maintain situational awareness during this high-profile public celebration.

Maj. Gen. Ali, ANA chief of communications, stressed the importance of providing communications with not only the ANA, but also the broad spectrum of organizations involved in national security. "The CSE had interoperability with the Ministry of the Interior, Presidential Security Unit, National Department of Security, and Army components," he said.

The CSE is still in the early stages of development, but progress is being made in all areas. Construction is underway on a complex in Kabul to provide training and maintenance areas, barracks, a dining facility and improved security. Modern communications and support equipment

**See RADIO Page 7**

## Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week



Courtesy Photo

### Afghan cultural tidbit

#### You are a good friend?

##### Dari

Shuma yak doste khoob hast-ed? (Shoo-ma yak doe-stay khoob huas-ted)

##### Pashtu

Tasoo yow khu malgeray yaste? (Tah-soo yow khoo mal-gah-ray yaws tay)

**Afghan social occasions are predominately family and extended family affairs. Picnics are important events on Fridays, the official government and religious holiday for Afghans. Many parties are for either male or female groups, and in rural areas of Afghanistan, if both genders are invited, they often participate separately.**

# Afghan, Coalition doctors provide care for Kunar residents

By Army Maj. Eric Zenk  
Task Force Spartan Public Affairs

**JALALABAD AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** – Afghan doctors and medics, along with Coalition members, moved into the Korengal Valley of eastern Afghanistan April 21 to provide medical assistance to more than 3,100 Afghans as part of Operation Lion's Pride.

The movement, located near the village of Arawara Bandeh, was a combined air drop and medical assistance program which ended April . The program provided cost-free treatment to people of the Kunar Province.

Many Afghans in this mountainous and rural northeastern province have only sporadic access to health care. Medical doctors and specialists from Task Force Lava and Coalition forces were providing the care.

Task force officials received a joint movement request from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines to air drop 24 containerized delivery systems in the Korengal Valley, according to Army Maj. Matthew Schwind, TFL support operations officer.

"The drop was scheduled for one-day -- however, the weather became a factor and we adjusted this requirement over a two-day span," he said. "We delivered 12 CDS on the first day and 12 on the second day.

Humanitarian assistance packages were also brought into the area by Afghan drivers.

"The local residents were notified by Asadabad Provincial Reconstruction



Photo by Marine Capt. Timothy Kelly

**An Afghan National Army soldier from the Commando Kandak of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 201st Corp, administers oral dewormer medication to a girl from Arawara Bandeh on April 23.**

Team members of the air drop and follow on medical care being provided to the community," said Marine Capt. Timothy Kelly, 1/3 Marines judge advocate, who is responsible for contracting and payments during the operation.

"This project started with the initial planning of the palletized air drops," Kelly said. "We hired local Afghans from the surrounding communities to help setup the drop zone by painting the DZ with the letter "A" on the ground and we waited for the supplies to be dropped.

"Local Afghans were hired to climb the hills and carry the supplies down into the villages for distribution," he added.

The movement was a joint effort by the Marines, Army and Air Force to get critical supplies including food, bottled water, medical supplies and clothes to people who need assistance, according to Kelly.

"These events allow us to make a solid connection with the local population in order to gain their support and keep this area from reverting back to a terrorist haven," he said.

This effort was an element of Operation Mountain Lion, part of the Coalition's ongoing offensive operations, which aim to establish enduring security for the people of Afghanistan .

## Coalition destroys caches in Kabul, Kunar, Ghazni provinces

**Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan Public Affairs**

**BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** – Afghan National Security and Coalition forces recovered more than 250 munitions and explosives in Kabul, Kunar and Ghazni provinces April 29.

Coalition explosive ordnance disposal teams destroyed 20 Claymore mines, 15 fuses, six mines, four mortars, three AT fuses, three rocket warheads, two artillery projectiles and two recoilless rifle rounds during a controlled detonation in Ghazni.

In separate incidents officials took 200

rounds of ammunition, 16 ammunition magazines, five weapon rack systems, three AK-47 assault rifles, two pistols and a machine gun with ammunition into custody.

"Recovering and disposing of these weapons increases the safety and security of Afghans, and reduces the danger in the area posed by criminals and insurgents who might use those munitions indiscriminately to cause harm on the Afghan people, Afghan Security Forces or Coalition forces," said Army Lt. Col Paul Fitzpatrick, Combined

Joint Task Force - 76 spokesman.

Coalition forces also discovered the remains of an improvised explosive device in Laghman Province April 29.

No injuries or damages were reported in the IED detonation.

In another incident in Kandahar Province, two bodyguards of Daman District leader, Niaz Mohamad, were injured by an IED.

"IEDs are indiscriminate killers and extremely dangerous," said Fitzpatrick. "These items pose a real danger to all who live and work around them."

# Afghan journalists graduate media basic training

**Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan  
Public Affairs**

**KABUL, Afghanistan** -- The Combined Security Transition Command -- Afghanistan, with the Central Training Center and the Kabul Military Training Center, conducted the first session of media ANA/ANP basic training to increase the media's overall knowledge of the ANP and ANA.

Recently, 13 Afghan journalists from 13 of the country's top news outlets took part in Media Basic Training -- a three-day, hands-on tour of the ANP's Central Training Center and the ANA's Kabul Military Training Center.

The goal was to come away with an understanding of how the forces are manned, trained and equipped; provide a better appreciation of the rigors and personal sacrifices of the forces; and understanding what it takes to survive in a combat environment.

"You are the people telling the ANP story to the Afghans.

I appreciate you coming here and seeing firsthand the training they learn," said CTC Commander Brig. Gen. Khodadad Aga, in a brief to the Afghan journalists.

He then explained the ANP's new structure -- stressing the fact ANP officers have no ties to crime or political parties, and are loyal to Afghanistan. He told them the cadet training focuses on human rights -- including women's rights and domestic violence; antidiscrimination and national unity; ethics, weapons training and maintenance, and literacy.

"The most important thing we learned, besides the hands-on training, was human rights training," said Muhammad Azad Niek, a reporter from the Hewad Daily Newspaper.

"The literacy training is important too. When a journalist asks a police officer a question, it helps if he can provide an intelligent answer. We wish we had known about this training before. Now that we know about it, we can write more about the ANP," he said.



Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Mason T. Lowery, CS TC-A

**Payanda Sargand, right, interviews an Afghan National Army officer at the Kabul Military Training Center recently during media basic training. Sargand is a reporter with British Broadcasting Corporation-Afghanistan.**

The journalists not only observed, but took part in the same training as the cadets and military recruits. At the CTC, they put on protective pads and took part in the ANP's two-on-one takedown demonstration. They grabbed batons and attacked ANP cadets who were armed with helmets and protective shields. They were handcuffed and used to show cadets proper handcuff procedures.

At the KMTC, the Afghan journalists were issued helmets, pistol belts and canteens before going through the same basic rifle marksmanship training as cadets. After BRM training, they had the opportunity to try to qualify on the ranges with the AK-47 assault rifle.

"I knew the ANP and ANA went through tough training. During media basic training, I

**See MEDIA Page 7**

## Enduring Voices

*How do you maintain a healthy lifestyle?*



**Marine Sgt. Chris Spiker**  
Bagram Airfield

*"Don't stuff yourself at the chow hall and PT twice a day if you've got the time."*



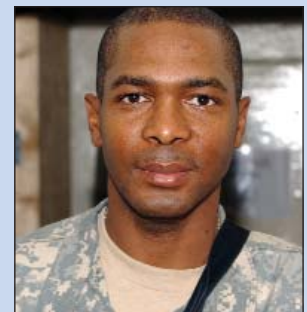
**Army Master Sgt. Terrance Hubbard**  
Bagram Airfield

*"Always try to find something to smile about. There's always something to reflect on."*



**Army Sgt. Sherica Sanders**  
Bagram Airfield

*"I keep a good routine and try to make leisure time for myself."*



**Army Sgt. 1st Class Alex Riley**  
Bagram Airfield

*"Praying. Constantly praying."*

# Lashkar Gah gets new conference hall

**By Army Sgt.  
Mayra Kennedy**  
*345th Mobile Public Affairs  
Detachment*

**LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan** -- Afghanistan officials and local citizens gathered during a ceremony here April 15 to celebrate the opening of a new conference hall built by the Lashkar Gah Provincial Reconstruction Team.

Speaking to the crowd, which included Lashkar Gah Mayor Monhaff and Helmand Province governor Daoud, PRT Commander Army Lt. Col. David Sias, of the 321st Civil Affairs Battalion based at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, described how a dream quickly became reality.



Photo by Army Sgt. Mayra Kennedy

**A group of children from Lashkar Gah gathered at the city's new conference hall during an opening ceremony April 15.**

"The project started as a dream, but now it has been constructed and became a reality," said Sias who resides in San Antonio. "This building stands tall in the face of the Hilmand

River as a symbol of progress and prosperity; a true testament of dreams come true."

After the contract was signed in January 2005, Sias quickly developed a positive relationship with Mayor Monhaff as the project got underway.

Members of the 321st, working together with the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion, based in Phoenix, Ariz., and local contractors, soon became familiar to

local citizens as they immersed themselves in the completion of the project.

The total project cost was approximately \$95,000, according to Army Maj. Eric C. Kotouch, officer in charge of the 492nd whose hometown is Phoenix.

The end result is a conference hall that will be used by Afghan officials as a tool to keep the gateway of communications open between locals and their government.

**See HALL, Page 7**



**"We will never forget the help we received from the PRT group."**

**Mayor Monhaff  
Lashkar Gah**

## ANA Soldiers wrap up week with Joint Logistics Command

**Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan  
Public Affairs**

**BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** -- Two Afghan National Army command officers and Joint Logistics Command officials ended a five-day seminar on logistics operations here April 22 to improve the ANA's logistics and supply system.

ANA Brig. Gen. Daleel Khan, strategic plans, operational and tactical affairs director, and ANA Col. Sardar Ahmad, strategic plans directorate deputy, observed strategic-level Coalition logistics operations at the JLC.

During the training, the officers were shown U.S. and Coalition commodity management techniques, received tours

and interacted with many of the Soldiers in the various workspaces.

"It is our desire to assist you in establishing the security and stability of this country," said Army Col. Larry Wyche, JLC commander.

"We know that both America and Afghanistan are brothers, and we need your assistance in creating a secure Afghanistan," said ANA Brig. Gen. Daleel Khan.

"Your assistance is positive for building security for Afghanistan and the message for our children is that America is our brother," he continued. "We will never forget those who have bled for Afghanistan," he added. "These are strong relationships that are being built."



Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Rautio  
Joint Logistics Command Public Affairs

**Army Sgt. Maj. Rodney D. McCarn, right, explains supply and services operations to Afghan National Army Brig. Gen. Daleel Khan, far left. McCarn, assigned to the Joint Logistics Command, is the support operations sergeant major.**

## MEDIA from Page 5

participated and was one of the recruits – so now I know what they go through,” said Payanda Sargand, a British Broadcasting Corporation – Afghanistan reporter and producer.

“After this, it will help my reporting because I know the facilities,” Sargand said. This knowledge will help me tell the ANP and ANA story.”

On the final day of media basic training, the Afghan journalists toured KMTC classes, recruits’ living quarters and dining facility, and had the opportunity to witness a tangible symbol of the ANA’s success – Kandak 49’s graduation from KMTC.

A kandak (battalion) consists of between 500 to 600 officers, noncommissioned officers and soldiers and is trained in 12 weeks at the KMTC. These

kandaks are made up of young men from all of Afghanistan’s major ethnic groups – Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen – and balanced according to the country’s national averages.

“The Afghan reporters need to come to KMTC to see what the soldiers go through so they can understand them and tell their stories well,” said ANA Sgt. Sawaiz, KMTC PAO non-commissioned officer. “A reporter needs to understand his subject so he knows what he’s writing about.”

At the end of the media basic training, the Afghan journalists turned in their Army gear, but instead of heading off to a Kandak to defend Afghanistan, they headed back to their offices to tell the stories of ANP and ANA success and growth to the Afghan people.

“The media, government,



Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Mason T. Lowery CS TC-A

**Hashmatullah Radfar, right, and Ehsan Rashidi tour Kabul Military Training Center recently during media basic training. Radfar is a reporter with Good Morning Afghanistan. Rashidi is a reporter with the Kabul Weekly Newspaper.**

police and Army seem to be inviting the media to meet enemies in Afghanistan, but freedom of speech is improving every day,” Sargand said.

“Inviting the media to meet the ANP and ANA helps them understand what they are trying to do in Afghanistan.”

## RADIO, from Page 3

is starting to flow into the unit as well.

In addition to the VHF and HF radios, the initial computer systems and vehicles have been delivered with more on the way.

Plans are also in place to provide the CSE with a sustaining communications capability including satellite terminals to reach back to the ANA strategic network for services. CSE is fully integrated in the ANA’s overall communication structure.

The communication unit has advanced radios, telephones and data systems ensuring compatibility, easier sustainment and reduced training requirements.

The current group at the CSE is only a small percentage of the projected force which is expected to reach nearly 300 people by the end of the year.

The staff and soldiers on hand are staying busy standing up the unit and training. CSE troops have joined their fellow ANA soldiers in radio training classes and many

are currently attending contracted information technology courses at the Ministry of Defense and Kabul University.

“This first deployment of the CSE was a big achievement for the Communications Section and the whole Army,” noted Ali. “This initial effort represents an important first step in realizing the vision for the Communication Support Element, a unit standing ready to provide the ANA with contingency communications support whenever and wherever needed.”

## HALL from Page 6

The new Lashkar Gah conference hall that represents the biggest achievement in the city and is the first of its kind in the Hilmand Province, Monhaff said.

“We will never forget the kind of help we’ve received from the PRT group,” said Monhaff.

I will always be grateful for the improvements made to Lashkar Gah by the U.S. including several renovations to the hospitals and schools, and assistance provided to the

sanitation department, he said.

“This building signifies the future and we are going to use it to address problems and I will do anything in our power to help our citizens,” said Monhaff.

His plan is to beautify the city as much as possible.

“Once upon a time, people used to call Lashkar Gah, Little America,” said Monhaff. “I will do my best to restore the Hilmand Province so that it looks like it did before.”



Photo by Army Sgt. Mayra Kennedy 345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

**Army Lt. Col. David Sias addresses Lashkar Gah citizens during an inauguration ceremony for the city’s new conference hall April 15. Sias is the commander of the Lashkar Gah Provisional Reconstruction Team.**



**An Afghan National Army soldier sweeps for mines and other explosives at the site of a medical, dental and veterinarian assistance operation in Khas Uruzgan on April 17.**



**Dr. Ahmed Sha, Khas Uruzgan village doctor, checks the blood pressure of a fellow villager April 17.**



## Doctors visit Khas Uruzgan Mountain villagers get health care

*Combined Forces Command -Afghanistan Public Affairs*

**KHAS URUZGAN, Afghanistan** -- More than 500 people and 1,500 animals received medical care here April 17-18 during an operation combining the efforts of Afghan soldiers, Coalition forces and a medical doctor.

U.S. Special Forces medical providers, dentists and a veterinarian, at the invitation of the village doctor, Dr. Ahmed Shah, vaccinated, pulled teeth, filled cavities, issued vitamins and advice during the two-day, civil-assistance project.

A company of Afghan National Army soldiers supported the operation by securing the village from any threat, screening traffic and maintaining crowd control. The soldiers also helped triage patients and distributed humanitarian aid items.

The operation was a good opportunity for ANA and Coalition forces to work together.

During the first day of the project, the ANA commander of the operation worked closely with his U.S. Special Forces' counterpart to review security challenges.

The special forces team commander was satisfied with the result.

"What we wanted to do today was show that first, the clinic in town is the place to go to get medical care," he said. "Second, we wanted to showcase the ANA to the villagers as their hope for a secure future in Afghanistan. We did those things and we helped a lot of people the last two days."



(Left) Afghans wait in line as the clinic in Khas Uruzgan opens for patients.



Dr. Ahmed Shah of the medical clinic writes out a prescription for medication April 18.

# Khas Uruzgan

## ay dose of humanitarian aid



Photos by Army Sgt. Cain S. Claxton

Afghans stretch their hands out for humanitarian aid packages delivered by Afghan National Army soldiers April 17.

# Navy doctor comes to Afghan boy's rescue

**By Army Sgt. Nina J. Ramon**  
**345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment**  
**FORWARD OPERATING BASE**

**GHAZNI, Afghanistan** -- After treating hundreds of casualties during a tour with the Marines in Iraq, and then treating hundreds more during his nine months in Afghanistan, Navy Lt. Cmdr. William Dave Holder thought he had seen it all. An 8-year-old Afghan boy with a medical condition virtually unheard of in the States quickly changed his mind.

Holder, a physician assistant attached to the 3-141 Battalion Aid Station here, normally tends to U.S. service members, Afghan National Army soldiers, Afghan National Policemen and local civilians.

But, the physician assistant permanently assigned to the Naval Medical Center in San Diego, also participates in weekly civilian outreach missions with ANA medics. Holder and the medical team in Ghazni processed nearly 1,000 patients in a few months of work in Afghan clinics. Many of the patients sought medical attention for wounds untreated for extended periods of time because professional care was not available.

During a weekly mission with an ANA medical battalion, Holder was asked by an Afghan doctor to assist with an Afghan boy named Abdul.

"(Abdul) had what appeared to be a piece of wood sticking out of his leg," said



**Army Cpt. Shawn Hermenau, an orthopedic surgeon with Task Force MED's 14th Combat Support Hospital in Bagram, visits with Abdul, an Afghan boy who received treatment from U.S. medical teams, and Abdul's father in the Bagram hospital.**

Holder. He soon realized it was Abdul's shinbone.

Abdul's story began four months earlier when he first injured his leg. Two months later, he re-injured the leg, causing the shin bone to protrude out of the skin.

"He had a series of injuries to his leg and was hobbling around trying to bear the weight," said Holder. "It was grossly infected — bone and skin. I decided I would get him taken care of," he added.

Special cases such as Abdul's are normally referred to the provincial reconstruc-

tion team medical clinic, according to Holder. In many circumstances, patients are then referred to the Egyptian Field Hospital at Bagram. Holder felt compelled to personally look after Abdul. He made some phone calls and eventually talked with orthopedic surgeon and Bountiful, Utah, native Dr. Shawn Hermenau at the 14th Combat Support Hospital in Bagram. Hermenau agreed to see Abdul.

It took more than two weeks to get

**See CARE, Page 12**

Photo by Navy Lt. Cmdr. William Dave Holder, 3-141 Battalion Aid Station



## PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

**Army 1st Sgt. Jim Centers helps an Afghan boy try on a pair of shoes during a civic assistance mission to an orphanage in Kapisa Tuesday. Centers is assigned to the 219th Area Support Group (Task Force Tiger).**

Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Ken McCooley  
 19th Public Affairs Detachment

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to [freedomwatch@baf.afgn.army.mil](mailto:freedomwatch@baf.afgn.army.mil). Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

# Married Soldiers share deployment

By Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry  
19th Public Affairs Detachment

**LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan --** Many married troops deployed to combat zones face long periods of time away from spouses.

A married couple assigned to the Lashkar Gah Provincial Reconstruction Team, however, spent the first five months of their marriage serving together in Afghanistan.

"We actually met before the deployment," Army Spc. Cody Catania said of her husband, Army Spc. Joseph Catania.

It was by chance the pair was stationed together in Afghanistan.

"I was supposed to go to another PRT, but at the last minute they switched me and a few other female medics...and I ended up going to Lashkar Gah," Cody said.

Although the Soldiers are assigned to different Texas National Guard units, they both serve with the 3rd Battalion, 141st Infantry, 36th Infantry Division in Afghanistan.

Before marriage, the two enjoyed watching movies together at the morale, welfare and recreation center and playing volleyball with their battle buddies.

"It wasn't like being back at home," Joseph said. "We couldn't go to the movies or out to dinner."

Joseph asked for Cody's hand in marriage Sept. 8, a few months into their deployments.

"It was after our first engagement with the Taliban -- I decided I needed to go

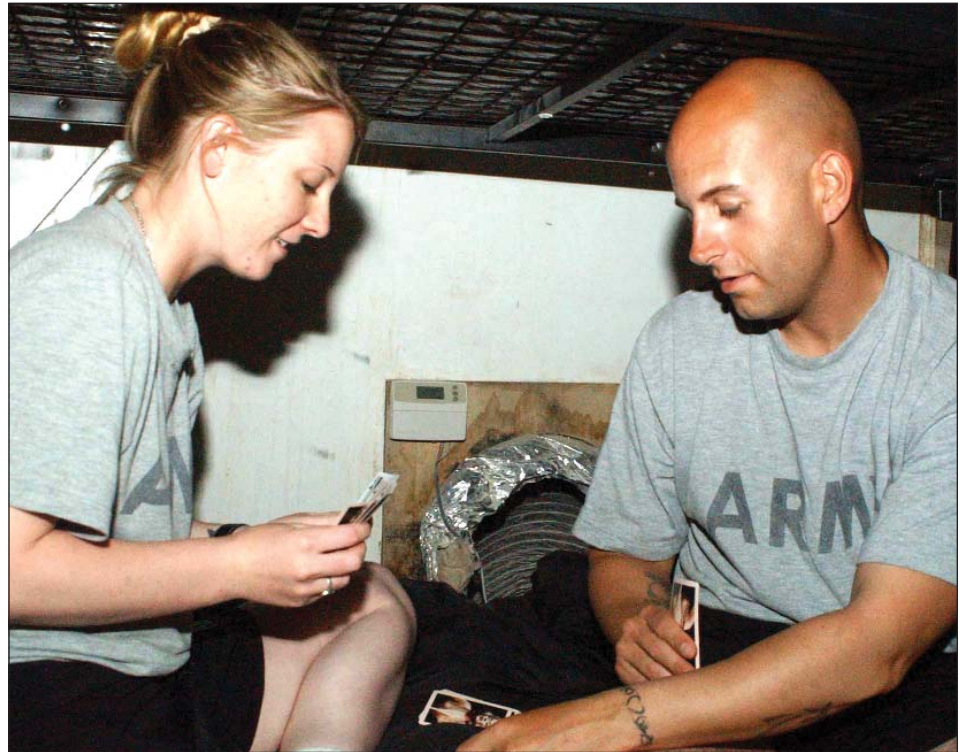


Photo by Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry

**Army Spcs. Cody, left, and Joseph Catania play cards April 26 at Kandahar Airfield as they wait to redeploy to the U.S. The recently married couple is assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division.**

ahead and settle down," said Joseph, an infantryman and former Marine.

With the help of their families, the couple planned a small marriage ceremony for November 11 (Veteran's Day) in Texas.

"I thought it was very fitting because we are both Soldiers," she said.

The duo agrees the marriage didn't make it harder to return to a combat zone and carry out their missions.

"Returning from leave is difficult,

regardless, and I never felt my marriage had any negative effects on how I performed as a Soldier," he said.

As their deployments draw to an end, the Catania's are preparing for a new life together.

"I'm not sure what it's like to be married in the real world because I've only been married here," she said.

Just knowing Joseph shared the same feelings and experiences in Afghanistan made it very comforting, she added.

## ANZAC Day remembered at Camp Eggers

**KABUL, Afghanistan --** Service members, patriots and civilians gathered at Camp Eggers here to pay tribute to and remember Australian and New Zealand Army Corps during an early morning ceremony April 25.

The ceremony explained how and why ANZAC Day is remembered. Following a prayer, a song and the playing of each country's national anthems, two minutes of silence were observed to show respect for the fallen service members.

The laying of wreaths and the placing of poppies is also part of the tradition to remember the fallen. The red poppies were among the first flowers to grow on the battlefields of World War I and came to symbolize the blood-drenched ground.

April 25 was officially named ANZAC Day in 1916, marking the first anniversary of the conflict fought by ANZAC forces during World War I. It is remembered around the world, on land and at sea on this day at dawn.



**Australian and New Zealand flags are flown at half staff during the ANZAC ceremony in Kabul on April 25.**

Photo by Army Spc. Carina M. Garcia  
345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

# Soldiers clearing rural routes stalk munitions

**By Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry**  
**19th Public Affairs Detachment**

**KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** — Getting service members from point A to point B successfully is essential to mission accomplishment in time of war.

The mission for the Soldiers of A Company, 37th Engineer Battalion is to make sure troops arrive safely at their destinations.

"We're here to provide assured mobility for American and Coalition forces," said Army Staff Sgt. Roman Ramos, a combat

engineer assigned to one of the unit's route-clearing packages.

The small team of route-clearing Soldiers is always on the prowl for improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance in their theater of responsibility.

Ramos and his troops use various pieces of equipment and tactical vehicles to help detect IEDs and UXOs along the roads they travel throughout Afghanistan.

"We're looking for indicators, like wires or anything that doesn't seem to belong," Ramos said.

Indicators could be random patterns or a break in a natural pattern, he added.

Handling IEDs and UXOs is a task taken seriously by the team.

"We're in a position where we get hands-on and face-to-face with whatever the munitions might be," he said. "So we take whatever steps we can to mitigate the risk prior to dismounting."

The team also focuses on the perimeter of the area being cleared.

"We want to avoid taking one bad situation and creating two or three more with a secondary device or a coordinated attack," Ramos added.

If a Soldier is injured, the route-clearing package relies on a medic who always travels with them.

"I'm here to bring my battle buddies back alive if anything happens," said Army Pfc. Adam Peters, a medic attached to the 37th Eng. Bn.

Despite the risk, Ramos said he realizes how beneficial his team's mission is to his fellow service members and the Afghan people.

"Afghanistan is littered with land mines, and we have places where people are put-

ting more devices into the roads," he said. Ramos said he believes route clearance is a never-ending operation.

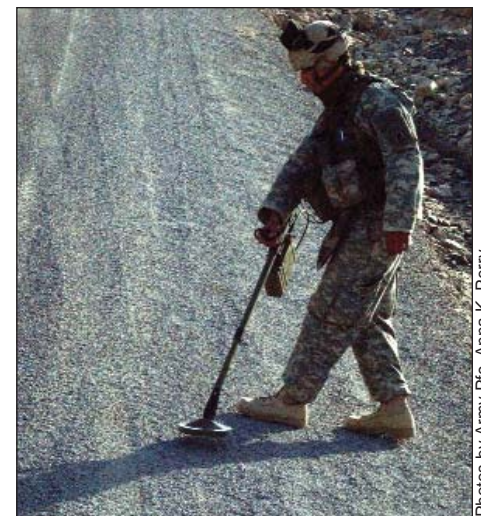
"This is extremely important," he said. "There's no number of clearances that we could do that would be enough."



**Soldiers dismount from a RG-31 Mine Protected Vehicle during a route clearing mission in southern Afghanistan's Uruzgan Province. The combat engineers are assigned to the 37th Engineer Battalion.**



**Army Staff Sgt. Roman Ramos checks grid coordinates on a map during a route clearing mission in southern Afghanistan's Uruzgan District. Ramos is a combat engineer assigned to the 37th Engineer Battalion.**



**Army Staff Sgt. Roman Ramos uses a metal detector on the road during a route clearing mission in southern Afghanistan's Uruzgan District. Ramos is a combat engineer assigned to the 37th Engineer Battalion.**

Photos by Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry

## CARE from Page 10

Abdul a flight to Bagram because of weather and flight requirements. While waiting, Holder paid the cab fare so Abdul and his father could visit the clinic each day to have the wound cleaned and dressed.

When the weather cleared, Abdul and his father traveled

to the U.S. hospital in Bagram where they met Hermenau and the rest of the team that would help save his leg. "When you see a kid that breaks his leg, and you get the chance to help him be able to go out and do kid stuff again," Holder said smiling, "it gives you a ray of hope." Holder believes helping

Afghans such as Abdul reinforces the positive relationship between Coalition forces and the local population. "Abdul is from a known trouble spot in the AO (area of operation), so hopefully this will be a good-news story for them that the Americans treated him well," said Holder. Because of his belief in the

Coalition mission in Afghanistan and the fulfillment he gets from helping others, Holder says he lives for the satisfaction he receives from each deployment. "I came to Afghanistan to take care of Soldiers and the people here and I think I did that," he said. "I'll come back a third time."

# Comaraderie, dedication bring Soldier back from injury

By Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry  
19th Public Affairs Detachment

**KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan** -- The ability to serve in Afghanistan is both an honor and a miracle for a Soldier stationed here.

A training accident at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., in 1999 was a life-altering experience, said Army Sgt. Andrew Blanco, a military corrections officer assigned to the 327th Military Police Company.

"Our tank broke down during the night -- I put the gun tube over the side so I could take a look at the engine compartment," said Blanco, then a tanker assigned to the 168th Armored Battalion at Fort Carson, Colo.

As he was assessing the situation, another tank crashed into the gun tube. The turret spun and sucked both of his feet underneath the engine compartment.

"When they pulled my feet out, both (feet) were spun around a couple of times --and I could see a bone sticking through my boot," Blanco said.

Doctors predicted he would probably never walk again.

"At first, I felt like I'd been cheated," Blanco said. "I loved being a tanker and couldn't understand why it had been taken away from me."

He said it was his passion for tanks and the military that provided the strength to overcome the doctors' prognosis.

"I loved ironing my uniform and having spit-shined boots, but mostly I loved my unit and my comrades," he said.

Blanco's tenacity eventually paid off and he returned to his unit.

"I was able to participate in a final gunnery, which is like the Super Bowl of tanks -- that was my goal from the beginning," he said.

Soon after the competition, the moment arrived for Blanco to decide whether he was going to reenlist or separate from the Army.

The chain-of-command did not think a career as a tanker was going to be possible, so they suggested finding a new specialty, he said.

"I said 'no way' -- if I can't be a tanker then I don't want to be anything," said



**Army Sgt. Andrew Blanco removes handcuffs from the hands of Army Spc. Ronald Benson during a detainee operations training class on Kandahar Airfield. Blanco is assigned to the 327th Military Police Company and Benson is assigned to the 561st Military Police Company.**

Blanco, who chose to return to his hometown in Illinois.

It was not until after Sept. 11, 2001, that Blanco said he realized he wanted to serve his country again.

"It was like an alarm telling me I was ready to go back," he said. Before he could rejoin, Blanco had to overcome one more obstacle.

He said he gained an excessive amount of weight because he wasn't able to adequately work out during his recovery.

"The recruiter told me I needed to lose 100 pounds to be a (military policeman)," said Blanco, who at the time was a state corrections officer and part-time police officer in Illinois.

"I established a new workout routine the next day," he said.

Seven months and 114 pounds lighter, Blanco once again put on his ironed uniform and spit-shined boots.

**Army Sgt. Andrew Blanco works on his legs at the gym on Kandahar Airfield. Blanco is assigned to the 327th Military Police Company, an Army Reserve unit from Illinois.**



Photos by Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry

# Air refueling squadron takes flight to fuel the fight

**By Air Force Senior Airman Mark R.W. Orders-Woempner**  
**379th Air Expeditionary Wing**  
**Public Affairs**

**SOUTHWEST ASIA** -- Fighters are in the air 24 hours a day, providing constant support to ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Without midair refueling, that coverage would be lost.

The 340th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron provides fuel to those thirsty fighters as they keep troops on the ground safe, said Air Force Lt. Col. Brou Gautier, 340th EARS commander.

"Our mission is simply to refuel the various aircraft supporting coalition

ground forces," Gautier said. "The fuel we provide to the close-air-support team increases loiter times, which in turn, allows a smaller force to be more effective over a longer period of time."

Refueling the fighters is crucial to the war on terrorism because of what they bring to the fight, the colonel said.

"The air refueling concept is a powerful enabler behind the speed, precision lethality, and flexibility characteristics inherent to airpower. The A-10 (Thunderbolt IIs), F-16 (Fighting Falcons), F-15 (Eagles) and other fighters provide the teeth. The fact that we can keep them in the air for longer periods of time facilitates concentration of mass with an unprecedented economy of force," he said.

"The way the war is being fought now would stop if we weren't around," said Air Force Capt. Joe Maxon, 340th EARS pilot. "We're able to allow the fighters to hang out in an area to provide the ground guys with the support they need."

Recently, the 340th EARS, which includes people and aircraft from nine active, Guard and Reserve units, was called to support Operation Mountain Lion over Afghanistan, Gautier said.

Operations reached their peak during the 10-day operation on April 15 when the unit off-loaded almost 50 percent of the millions of pounds of fuel transferred midair in the entire U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, said James Malachowski, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing historian. It was the largest one-day offload of fuel in the region since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003, Malachowski said.

Highlighting the accomplishments of his unit during Operation Mountain Lion, Gautier said the 340th EARS offloaded three times the combined amount of fuel offloaded by the nine tanker units the people in the squadron are deployed from.

The 340th EARS offloaded more than 10 million pounds of fuel while consuming 10 million pounds flying

the missions during those 10 days.

Having the success the 340th EARS and other refueling units have had does come with a price, said the colonel. The typical rotation for a crew is 70-30, that is, for every 70 days the crews are deployed, they get to spend around 30 days at home.

"That takes a tremendous toll on our crew force," the colonel said, who added the Reserve and Guard forces have helped take pressure off the active-duty crews.

"The volunteer Guard and Reserve partners, who seamlessly plug into active-duty lines, allow for better training opportunities for active-duty aircrews at home and relief from a heavy deployment schedule," Gautier said.

The KC-135 crews and their maintainers don't just deploy to combat zones, said Air Force 1st Lt. Jesse Stubbs, a 340th EARS pilot.

"If we're not supporting the fighters directly, then we're helping move the airlift and bomber assets overseas," Lieutenant Stubbs said. "We do this by forming an air bridge across the ocean that fuels those aircraft as they cross over."

Aerial refueling is not the only mission of the tanker crews, said Air Force Staff Sgt. Anthony Krisher, 340th EARS boom operator.

"We often haul cargo and passengers while performing the main mission of refueling," said Krisher. "Boom operators often act like loadmasters, which isn't what I expected when I was a crew chief."

Despite the stresses inherent with the mission, Gautier said this is an exciting time to be in the tanker world.

"Taking part in these missions is incredibly exciting because when people review the history, they'll be looking at the success of an operation from the lessons learned perspective," he said. "The possibility that any of our daily operations here could be a decisive point in the global war on terrorism drives a tremendous amount of energy into what we do."



Photo by Air Force Senior Airman Mark R.W. Orders-Woempner

**The reflection of a KC-135R Stratotanker is seen in the cockpit window of an F-15E Strike Eagle from the 336th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron as it refuels over Iraq on April 18. Fighters like the F-15E are able to stay in the air longer while providing support to ground forces because of the KC-135's mission.**

# Afghans celebrate freedom

**Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan Public Affairs**

**KABUL, Afghanistan** -- Afghans celebrated Asht-e-Sawr, the 14th anniversary of the Mujahideen rebels' victory over the country's former Soviet-backed government with a grand military parade April 28.

The parade, which highlighted the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, began with President Hamid Karzai inspecting the troops before taking his place alongside government ministers, former Mujahideen leaders and numerous foreign diplomats and military representatives.

Units of the ANA and ANP marched past the reviewing stands in neat formations, followed by a vast display of military equipment including tanks, helicopters, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces and more.

Addressing the crowd, Karzai expressed his confidence in the successful involvement of the ANA and ANP in Afghanistan's ongoing reconstruction.

"We are determined to promote our national interests now that Afghanistan is no longer under the rule of others, but under the rule of Afghans," he said.



Photos by Army Staff Sgt. Mason T. Lowery, CS TC-A

**Buzkashi players, representing the free spirit of Afghanistan, ride in the Asht-e-Sawr, a parade honoring the 14th anniversary of the Mujahideen rebels' victory over the country's former Soviet-backed government. Buzkashi is the national sport of Afghanistan and dates back almost 1,000 years.**



**Afghans view a symbol of their country's military capability as a T-62 tank rumbles past a reviewing stand April 28 during Asht-e-Sawr, a parade honoring the 14th anniversary of victory over the country's former Soviet-backed government.**

# *Freedom Watch*

*May 8, 2006*

**“Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace. ”**

**-- Amelia Earhart**